

kettle-oven; the Greenhouse (1835) which overlooks the formal garden, also restored, and is home to tropical plants; the Bimeler Museum (1868) which illustrates the society's last decade; the Bakery (1845) where the community's bread was prepared; the Tinshop (1825), a half-timbered structure where metalware was made; the Wagon Shop (1840) where the wheelwright fashioned vehicles; the Blacksmith Shop (1834), where iron implements were forged and horses were shod; and the Dairy (1841), where milk from the society's 100 cows was transformed into butter and cheese.

Zoar Village State Memorial, administered by the Ohio Historical Society, is open from April through October. It is located on State Route 212, three miles southeast of I-77, south of Canton. Write to: Zoar Village, Box 404, Zoar, OH 44697; call 1-800-874-4336; or visit <www.ohiohistory.org/places/zoar> for information or a list of special events.

Kathleen M. Fernandez is Site Manager of Zoar Village State Memorial and Fort Laurens State Memorial for the Ohio Historical Society.

Photos courtesy Ohio Historical Society.

Rustin Quaide

Origins of the Utopian Idea

The western idea of utopia originates in the ancient world, where legends of an earthly paradise lost to history (e.g., Eden in the Old Testament, the mythical Golden Age of Greek mythology), combined with the human desire to create, or recreate, an ideal society, helped form the utopian idea. The Greek philosopher Plato (427?-347 BC) postulated a human utopian society in his Republic, where he imagined the ideal Greek city-state, with communal living among the ruling class, perhaps based on the model of the ancient Greek city-state of Sparta. Certainly the English statesman Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) had Plato's Republic in mind when he wrote the book Utopia (Greek ou, not + topos, a place) in 1516. Describing a perfect political and social system on an imaginary island, the term "Utopia" has since entered the English language meaning any place, state, or situation of ideal perfection. Both the desire for an Edenic Utopia and an attempt to start over in "unspoiled" America merged in the minds of several religious and secular European groups and societies.

The 19th-century utopian sects can trace their roots back to the Protestant Reformation. Following the early Christian communities, communal living developed largely within a monastic context, which was created by Saint Benedict of Nursia (480?-543?AD), who founded the Benedictine order. During the

Middle Ages a communal life was led by several lay religious groups such as the Beghards and Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit. In allowing the sexes to live in the same community, these societies differed from the earlier Catholic and Orthodox monasteries.

The Protestant Reformation, which originated with the teachings of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564), changed western European societal attitudes about the nature of religion and work. Luther broke with the medieval conception of labor, which involved a hierarchy of professions, by stressing that all work was of equal spiritual dignity. Calvin's doctrines stressed predestination, which stated that a person could not know for certain if they were among God's Elect or the damned. These theological ideals about work were stressed in the various American religious utopian societies.

In the wars and general disorder following the establishment of Protestant sects in northern Europe, many peasants joined Anabaptist and millenarianist groups, some of which, like the Hutterian Brethren, practiced communal ownership of property. To avoid persecution several of these groups immigrated to America, where the idea of communal living developed and expanded.

Rustin Quaide is a historian with the National Register of Historic Places, Washington, DC.